Colorado National Monument

Colorado
National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior

C 72/4

Official Map and Guide

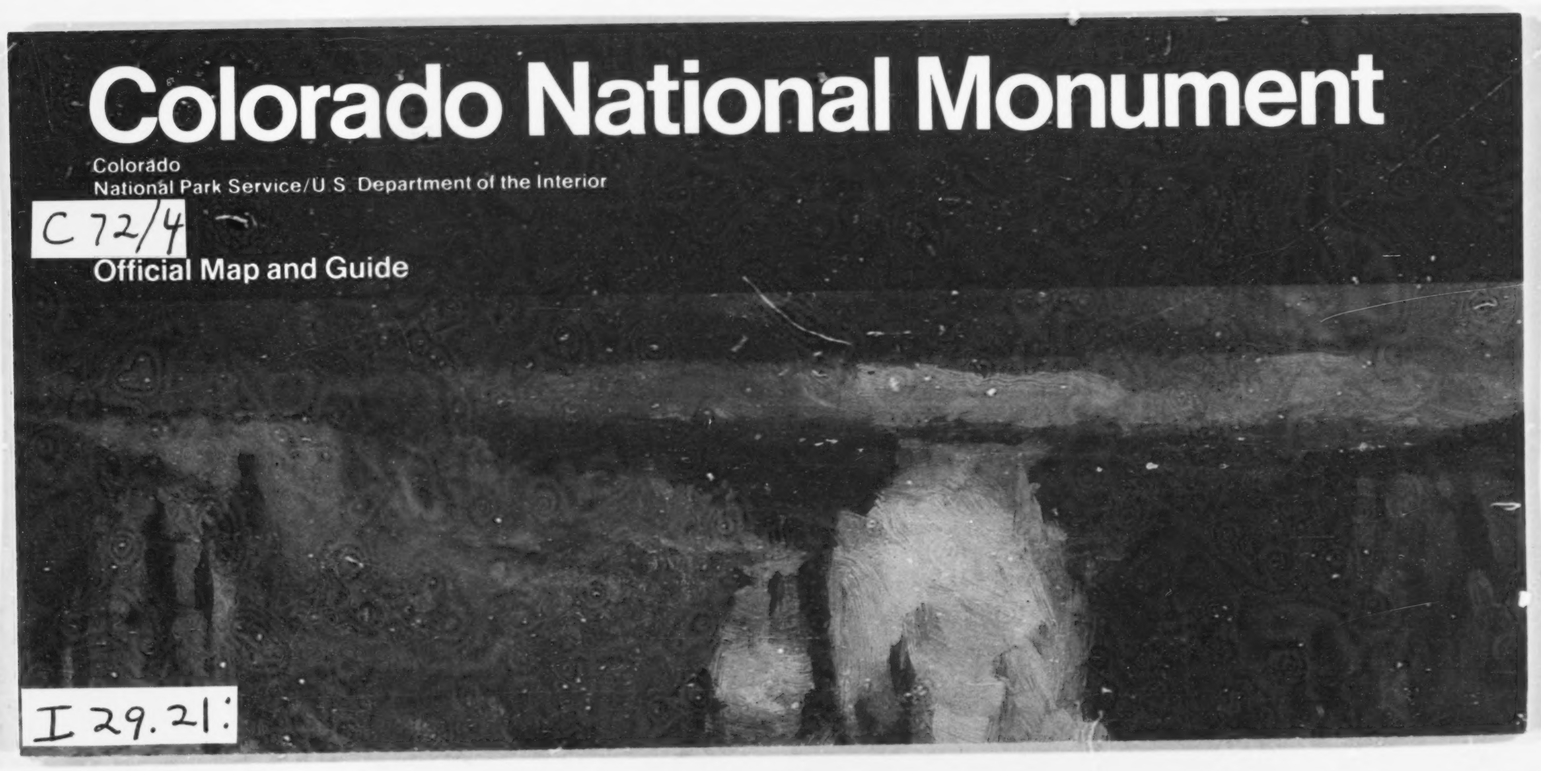

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Illustration by Milton Kobayashi

Colorado National Monument preserves one of the grand landscapes of the American West. Bold, big, and brilliantly colored, this plateau-and-canyon country, with its towering masses of naturally sculpted rock, embraces 32 square miles of rugged, up-and-down terrain. This is a special place, where you can contemplate glorious views that stretch to distant horizons; where you can discover solitude deep in a remote canyon; where you can delight in wild country where desert bighorn roam and golden eagles soar. In the spirit of those with the foresight to create Colorado National Monument in 1911, and the many since who have sought to protect it, please treat the park with respect so you and others can share in its grandeur tomorrow.

Atop the Plateau

The Uncompahgre Plateau rose high above its surrounding terrain millions of years ago during the gigantic upheaval that also created the Rocky Mountains.

The highcountry of Colorado National Monument rises more than 2,000 feet above the Grand Valley of the Colorado River. Situated at the edge of the Uncompahgre Uplift, the park is part of the greater Colorado Plateau, which also embraces such geologic wonders as the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, and Arches. It is a semi-desert land of pinyon pines and Utah junipers, ravens and jays, desert bighorns and coyotes. Magnificent views from highland trails and the Rim Rock Drive, which winds along the plateau, stretch from the colorful sheer-walled canyons and fascinating rock sculptures to the distant Colorado River valley, the purple-gray Book Cliffs, and the huge flat-topped mountain called Grand Mesa.

Backcountry Canyons

Tom Till

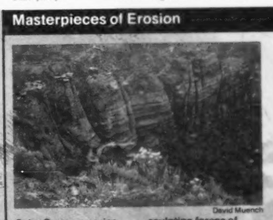
The many sheer-walled canyons were carved primarily by the erosive force of flood-waters flowing over the plateau for millions of years. Recent rockfalls demonstrate that water, wind, and frost continue to cut the canyons wider and deeper today.

In the deep canyons of Colorado National Monument, where vertical cliff walls and great natural rock sculptures tower overhead, the grand scale of the scenery is overpowering. Nowhere is this more true than in Monument and Wedding Canyons, where the giant rock forms of Independence Monument, the Pipe Organ, the Kissing Couple, Sentinel Spire, and the Praying Hands rise from the canyon floor like skyscrapers-in-stone.

But the canyons are places, too, where the cascading song of the canyon wren echoes; where small life-sustaining pools linger after summer rains; where cottonwood trees turn golden in autumn. The canyons can be explored along backcountry trails, on foot, or on horseback. On a slow and quiet journey, you might encounter mule deer, desert cottontails, antelope ground squirrels, rock squirrels, chipmunks, lizards, or canyon birds such as pinyon jays, white-throated swifts, and rock wrens. Mountain lions, midget faded rattlesnakes, and other rare or secretive members of the canyon community are seen less often. In spring and summer, cactus, yucca, and other flowering plants bloom by the hundreds, many near springs, along seeps in rock walls, or near canyon pools and intermittent streams. These oases of water are lush compared to the sparse desert scrub life of pinyon, juniper, sagebrush, mountain mahogany, and rabbitbrush that inhabits the more common arid portions of the canyons.

Illustration by Celia Strain

Masterpieces of Erosion



David Muench

Coke Ovens: a series of colorful rock domes created by the natural sculpting forces of wind, water, and ice.

Window Rock: a hole carved out of a crack in a stone wall by thousands of years of relentless erosion.

Balanced Rock: a 600-ton boulder perched atop a pedestal.

From 450-foot-high Independence Monument, the largest free-standing rock formation in the park, to the smallest detail carved in stone, the grand sculptor in Colorado National Monument has been erosion. Time—and lots of it—has been a loyal ally, for it has taken millions of years to carve the many massive rock spires, huge domes, balanced rocks, arches, windows, stone pedestals, and sheer-walled canyons that make up the scenic splendor of the park. The erosive forces of water, wind, and frost work very slowly. Differences in the characteristics of the many layers of sandstone, shale, and other sedimentary rocks of the area help determine what form the rocks take. The harder rock layers are more resistant to erosion. One such layer—the Kayenta Formation—forms the protective caprock of Independence Monument and other bold, angular rock forms. Once it has been eroded away, rounded shapes like those of the Coke Ovens are formed from the less resistent underlying layers. Fractures in the rock also influence erosive forces. The remarkable colors—vivid reds, purples, oranges, and browns—are created by iron and other minerals in the rock.

Illustration by Celia Strain

The Creation of Independence Monument

1 Independence Monument (shown on cover) was once part of a massive rock wall that separated Monument and Wedding Canyons.

2 Slowly, as the forces of erosion enlarged these canyons, the dividing wall was narrowed and weakened.

3 Weathering proceeded more rapidly in places where the rock was most vulnerable—along natural fractures. Eventually the wall was breached and parts of it collapsed.

4 Today a remnant of the once solid rock wall survives as Independence Monument, a free-standing monolith. In time, it too will succumb to the ravages of time and weather.

One Man's Dream

"I came here last year and found these canyons, and they felt like the heart of the world to me," John Otto wrote in 1907. "I'm going to stay . . . and promote this place, because it should be a national park." Some folks thought John Otto was crazy. He lived alone out in the wild and desolate canyon country southwest of Grand Junction, and he loved the land so much that he campaigned tirelessly for it to be set aside as a national park. Urged by Otto, the citizens of Grand Junction deluged politicians in Washington D.C. with letters and petitions in support of the proposal. Meanwhile, Otto built miles of tortuous trails through the proposed park area so others could appreciate its beauty. And he did it all without hope of any personal gain. It was, indeed, an unusual thing for a man to do. But in 1911, Otto's dream came true: Colorado National Monument was established. Otto was rewarded for having walked the park's rocky trails gladly did until 1927 [illegible]

Illustration by Milton Kobayashi

Map and Guide

Visitor Center
The visitor center offers exhibits and an introductory slide show. Books, maps, and film are sold at the center, and rangers are on hand to help plan your visit and to answer questions. Schedules of programs such as guided walks and campfire talks are posted at the center. Such programs are given every day in the summer and less often the rest of the year. The center is open every day.

Rim Rock Drive
Rim Rock Drive offers 23 miles of breathtaking views. The road climbs from the Grand Valley of the Colorado River to the park's highcountry, then winds along the plateau rim. The drive is ideal for bicycling as well as motor tours. A guide booklet is available at the visitor center. You can park at several roadside overlooks along the way and enjoy panoramas of the park's great rock sculptures, canyons, and distant valleys and mountains. A loop tour can be made by driving Rim Rock Drive, Colorado Rt. 340, South Broadway, and South Camp Road. Obey speed limits on Rim Rock Drive and watch for wildlife, fallen rocks, and other hazards.

Camping
Saddlehorn Campground is situated near the visitor center in a pinyon-juniper scrub forest. Campsites are available first-come, first-served. Each site offers a table, charcoal grill, and access to drinking water and restrooms. A fee is charged. Backcountry camping is free and is permitted anyplace more than ¼ mile from roads and 100 yards from trails. Other federal, state, and commercial campgrounds are located near the park.

Picnicking
There are two picnic areas, one near the visitor center and a second near the park's East Entrance. Both have tables, charcoal grills, water, and restrooms; the second also features a large shelter.

Other Activities
Hiking and horseback riding (see below), cross-country skiing, rock climbing, and bicycling are other popular pastimes. Wheeled or motorized vehicles are not permitted on trails or other off-road areas.

Area Services and Accommodations
Food, lodging, gasoline, and camp supplies are available in Grand Junction, Fruita, and other nearby communities.

Handicap Access
Some park overlooks, backcountry areas, and other park sites and facilities are handicap-accessible; check at the visitor center for information.

Safety and Regulations
The climate is normally mild, but beware of extremes. Lightning, high winds, and flash floods can accompany summer storms. During a storm, avoid open, exposed areas and low-lying areas such as canyon bottoms.

All animals, plants, and historical objects are protected. Observe wildlife from a distance, and do not feed. Firearms and other weapons are prohibited.

Watch your step—and your children—at overlooks and other steep drop-offs. Do not throw rocks or other objects over cliffs; persons below may be injured.

Pets must be leashed at all times. They are not permitted in buildings, on trails, or anywhere in the backcountry.

Don't litter: In the backcountry, pack out trash; do not burn or bury it.

Fires are permitted only in charcoal grills provided, or in campstoves. Wood fires are prohibited.

Carry your own water supply. Pools, or streams may contain harmful substances such as selenium, or bacteria such as Giardia.

Information
For more information write: Colorado National Monument, Fruita, CO 81521; or call (303) 858-3617.

Karen Kunzelman

Cold Shivers Point: one of many dramatic overlooks along Rim Rock Drive.

GPO 1989—242-345/80144

Park Trails

Exploring by trail is one of the best ways to see Colorado National Monument in any season. Hikers can choose short trails to spectacular overlooks or lengthier backcountry trails into canyons or across mesas. The chart below briefly describes each trail. Undeveloped trail routes, which follow canyon drainages or are marked by rock cairns, are included in the descriptions. Plateau trails are level or gradually sloping; other trails may have short stretches requiring a steep ascent or descent. When choosing a trail, consider your time, interests, hiking experience, and physical fitness.

Carry plenty of water and wear hiking boots or other footgear appropriate for walking on rocky or sandy surfaces. Pace yourself if you begin to tire and keep an eye on the weather. If you are going to travel a backcountry trail or hike off-trail, carry a topographic map and notify a ranger or friend of your plans. Mountain bikes, other off-road vehicles, and pets are prohibited on trails or anywhere in the backcountry. Horses are allowed on all trails except Serpents Trail. For information on backcountry camping, see "Camping" above.

Short Trails

		One-Way Distance	One-Way Avg. Time
Window Rock Level loop trail through pinyon-juniper woodland with excellent views of Monument and Wedding Canyons and most of their major rock formations, including Independence Monument. Ends at overlook with panoramic view of the Grand Valley of the Colorado River.		¼ mile	¼ hour
Canyon Rim Level trail following the cliff edge above colorful Wedding Canyon. Outstanding views of Wedding Canyon, Monument Canyon, Independence Monument, and Window Rock.		½ mile	½ hour
Otto's Trail Gently sloping trail that leads to overlook with dramatic panoramas of Independence Monument, the Pipe Organ, canyons, and more distant features.		½ mile	½ hour
Coke Ovens Trail descends gradually to overlook where the geologic wonders of the massive rounded Coke Ovens can be seen, as well as Monument Canyon.		½ mile	½ hour
Devils Kitchen Gradual descent to Devils Kitchen, a natural grotto surrounded by huge upright boulders. Trail crosses streambed of No Thoroughfare Canyon.		⅛ mile	½ hour
Serpents Trail Called "the Crookedest Road in the World," this historic trail has more than 50 switchbacks. The trail climbs steadily from east to west. Engineered by John Otto in the early 1900s, this route was part of the main road into the highcountry until 1950.		2⅛ miles	2 hours

Backcountry Trails

		One-Way Distance	One-Way Avg. Time
Old Gordon Trail Steadily ascending trail that follows the path of historic lumber and cattle drive road. The park's geologic story as told through the layers of rock is naturally exhibited almost in its entirety along this largely undeveloped trail route.		4 miles	2½ hours
Black Ridge Highest trail in the park with far-reaching views west to Utah canyonlands, east to Grand Valley, and south to the San Juan Mountains. Follows up-and-down terrain of Black Ridge. Trail crosses Bureau of Land Management lands.		6½ miles	3 hours
Monument Canyon Steep 600-foot descent from the plateau into Monument Canyon where many of the park's major rock sculptures—Independence Monument, Kissing Couple, and the Coke Ovens—tower overhead.		6 miles	3½ hours
Ute Canyon Rigorous descent into narrow Ute Canyon from the plateau follows a maintained trail. Undeveloped trail route then follows streambed with seasonal stream and pools bordered by cottonwoods and willows. A few arches may be seen.		7 miles	4 hours
Liberty Cap Trail winds across gently sloping Monument Mesa through pinyon-juniper forest and sagebrush flats for 5½ miles to Liberty Cap rock sculpture. Ideal for horseback riding and cross-country skiing. Last 1½ miles drops steeply to Grand Valley.		7 miles	4 hours
No Thoroughfare Descent from plateau on maintained trail followed by undeveloped trail route through remote No Thoroughfare Canyon. Canyon walls rise more than 400 feet above floor.		8½ miles	8 hours

Help the National Park Service maintain a cordial relationship with its neighbors by respecting private property owners' rights. Please do not trespass.

Trail · Undeveloped trail route · Overlook · Unpaved road · Locked access gate · Distance along Rim Rock Drive · Ranger station · Access for disabled · Picnic area · Campground